

Tests of bullet fail to prove a JFK plot

By Jack Thomas
Globe Staff

Radiation tests of bullet fragments involved in the murder of John Kennedy, long sought as potential proof there was a conspiracy to assassinate the President, contain nothing to challenge the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

The test, a neutron activation analysis, was conducted by the FBI in 1964 at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee. The results, which have never been published, show that the bullet found on the floor of a corridor in Parkland Hospital, Dallas, was similar in

atomic composition to fragments from the wrist of former Texas Gov. John Connally.

Those who believe there was more than one assassin have based parts of their argument on the possibility that the bullet found in the hospital corridor was not the bullet that had wounded Connally.

They have engaged in litigation for more than five years to obtain the results of the FBI tests, because proof that the bullets were different would have meant, inescapably, that there was more than one assassin.

The FBI test, now available to the public as a result of an amendment to the Freedom of Information Act, does not prove that Oswald acted alone, or even that Oswald was the assassin.

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But it does reinforce the commission's conclusion about the number of bullets fired, and it does help resolve one of the more perplexing suspicions about the Kennedy assassination.

Conspiracy theorists who are campaigning for a congressional investigation of Kennedy's murder may now be forced to alter their strategy, deemphasize the significance of the bullet in the corridor and concentrate on a number of other unresolved questions.

In a neutron activation analysis, a sample of metal is bombarded with radia-

tion and the emissions show to a millionth part the amount of each element present in the sample.

Critics of the Warren Commission never have accepted the conclusion that the first shot fired that day in Dallas passed through President Kennedy's neck into the back of Connally, hit Connally's rib, emerged under his right nipple, smashed through his wrist and lodged in his thigh.

The Warren Commission also said the bullet that caused all that damage fell out of Connally's wound and onto his stretcher, and was found later, virtually undamaged, by a hospital engineer at Parkland who bumped into the stretcher and heard the bullet fall to the floor.

Critics call it super bullet.

The commission said the engineer gave the bullet to his superior who gave it to the head of hospital security who gave it to a Secret Service agent who carried it back to Washington and gave it to the FBI.

That was too much for the skeptics to accept.

Although ballistic tests showed the super bullet had been fired from Oswald's rifle, there were too many coincidences and the chain of possession was so suspect that a number of people concluded the bullet in the hospital corridor was a device to incriminate Oswald. They hoped the FBI tests would show the bullet could not possibly have been the one which passed through Connally.

Critics of the Warren Commission have complained that it was impossible for them to accept the commission's single-bullet theory without access to the data which influenced the commission.

You were right about German - mystic - mad - mattle - all went well
and the right way you gave to us - and did not
steal him.

— a copy to Jim L. when I get home I will send his address

B. Zilk. May 20. 1925, p. 1.



Bullet which allegedly passed through Kennedy's neck.

For example, Dr. Cyril Wecht of Pittsburgh, an eminent forensic pathologist and long-time critic of the Warren Commission, described the importance of the FBI tests in an article in *Modern Medicine* last October:

"... if it (were) found that the composition of the lead in the fragment from Gov. Connally's wrist wound was indistinguishable from the composition of the lead in the nearly whole bullet found at Parkland Hospital, that fact alone would lend strong support to the single bullet theory since under that theory the commission had postulated that all the nonfatal wounds of both the President and the governor had been inflicted by (the bullet from the corridor); whereas, if the compositions were significantly different, the single bullet theory would have to be abandoned . . ."

One Warren Commission critic who is reconsidering his theories as a result of the FBI test is Wecht's associate, Robert Smith, a chemical engineer who has been studying the assassination for more than five years.

Smith's conclusion that Kennedy and Connally were hit by different bullets was based on three suppositions:

★ That Connally re-

sponds to his wound at least one half second later than Kennedy.

★ That the angles of their wounds appear to be incompatible.

★ And it seems impossible that the super bullet could have produced seven holes, struck two bones and then fallen out of Connally's wound in nearly perfect condition.

"But we're going to have to reconsider the last argument," he said. "Maybe there's some way that bullet could have travelled its way through without being damaged." argument," he said. "Maybe there's some way that bullet could have travelled its way through without being damaged."

Smith emphasized that

the FBI tests do not prove that the super bullet also wounded Kennedy. No fragments of bullet were found in the President's neck during the autopsy and, therefore, no comparison can be made.

In 1968, three forensic pathologists who examined the X-rays noticed metal particles in the soft tissue of the neck, but there is no expectation that Kennedy's body would be exhumed so the particles could be com-

pared with the super bullet and with particles from Connally's wrist.

Not all the Warren Commission critics are persuaded by the FBI data. In the past few weeks, Dr. Vincent Guinn, director of atomic research at the University of California, has analyzed the data and based on his evaluation, two of the most severe Warren Commission critics have dismissed the FBI test as inconclusive.

They are Wecht and Dr. John Nichols, an associate professor of pathology at the University of Kansas Medical Center. "I infer that the FBI analysis is inconclusive," said Wecht.

Nichols, who assisted Dr. Guinn in a computer analysis of the FBI figures, said they were "incomplete, contained errors and had essential factors missing."

Nichols lost a suit in 1969 against the FBI and the US archivist to obtain the neutron activation analysis tests and the original fragments for further study.

In February, when amendments to the Freedom of Information Act took effect, Nichols filed another suit and the FBI released the data.

Nichols said this week that he would file another suit next month to obtain permission to perform neutron activation analysis on the President's coat, the super bullet and fragments from Connally's wrist.

"There have been improvements in the cutting technique," he said. "We went to examine the autopsy photographs, the clothing and the rifle and we went to block a clip

from the rifle. These tests could prove whether Oswald acted alone."

The FBI spectrographer who conducted the tests 11 years ago is John Gallagher, now retired in Maryland.

"We found nothing in the analysis to refute the Warren report," he said. "There's a variation there, possibly because of instrumental error or possibly because of an inhomogeneous distribution in the elements themselves. That kind of variation will recur no matter what type of examination they conduct and consequently you can't make a strict judgment that a particular fragment came from a particular bullet."

Neither the analysis itself nor a letter written by then FBI director J. Edgar Hoover about the tests was included in the commission's 20 volumes of evidence published with its report.

Thirty-three congressmen have cosponsored legislation for a special committee with the powers of the Watergate committee to investigate the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King and the wounding of Gov. George Wallace.

Five physicians who examined President Kennedy's autopsy last month

say they found no reason to challenge the Warren Commission's conclusion. Their report has been filed with the Rockefeller CIA commission, which ordered the study in response to a growing national clamor for a new investigation.

As long ago as 1968, 78 percent of Americans polled nationwide doubted the conclusion of the Warren Commission.

Sen. Edward Kennedy said a few weeks ago that he would support a new investigation if there was new evidence.

Gallagher tested the super bullet, the fragment from Connally's wrist and three other fragments found in Kennedy's car. He evaluated the silver and antimony content of each item. One of the criticisms of his test was that he used only two elements.

He said that only two elements had shown up on the test. "We'd love to have had others," he said, "but this was the best we could do for the state of the art at the time."

Other chemists say that today as many as a dozen elements could be tested.